

Magic, myth and connected practices of the Ancient Tamils

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Introduction: Like any ancients, the Tamils practiced certain magic and soothsaying practices in their social life connected with myths. They are revealed through Veriyadal (வெறியாடல்), Kaimmai (கைம்மை), Neyyani mayakkam (நெய்யணி மயக்கம்), madalerudal (மடலேறுதல்), sati, and other rites, rituals or sacraments. The myth hidden in such practices, development of other sacraments etc., is analyzed in this paper. The practice of observing omens and augury is also studied, as they are found to be interconnected. So far scholars¹ have made some remarks about these practices as strange customs, superstition and so on, but have not explained the hidden myth. The Tamilnadu Government has brought out two volumes of “History of Tamilnadu” in which, the “Beliefs of Sangam people” have been discussed, but they are not explained². All references mentioned here are from the ancient Tamil literature, popularly known as “Sangam literature” comprising Pattuppattu (பத்துப்பாட்டு) and Ettuttogai (எட்டுத்தொகை). Tolkappiyam (தொல்காப்பியம்) sutras are used to explain the sociological processes involved. For convenience, the respective work, verse no, line no are given, then and there, for ready reference and cross-check with the primary source.

Astrology, soothsaying etc: They have been keen observers of sky, planets and starts as is evident from many references recorded in the literature³.

The word “kani” [கணி, oracle, sign] is equated with “jyotisha” or astrology and it is in turn matched with certain living and non-living things⁴. They believe that lizard has red tongue that predicts future events and voice sounding like bell and hence, it is a “kani”(Agam. 151 : 13-15). Vengai (வேங்கை - Pterocarpus bilobus) tree is also attributed with astrology, as it flowers periodically (Nat. 373 : 6-8). The repeated and periodical events, incidences and happenings are logically linked on the basis of “cause and effect”. The time is measured with the movement of earth with reference to Sun and sky (Puram. 30: 1-5). The days are calculated based on the moon (Puram. 118-2). The division of a day in to 24 hours and it is in turn in to 5 divisions kalai (morning), pagal (day), malai (evening), yamam (night), vidiyal (early morning) [Kurun. 32: 1-2]. These five periods are sanctified in rituals.

¹ V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *Studies in Tamil literature and History*, Luzac and co, London, 1930, pp.303-305.

N. Subramanian, *Sangam Polity – The Administration and social Life of the Sangam Polity*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966. See 16. Special beliefs and Superstitio, pp.321-323.

² Expert Committee, *History of Tamilnadu Sangam Age (Social)*, Directorate of Tamil Development, Madras, 1983, pp.115-126

³ M. Shanmugam Pillai, *Tamil Nulgalil Kalakkanippu (Time reckoning in Tamil literature)*, in Tamazhayvu, No.4, University of Madras Madras, 1976, pp.1-58.

⁴ In Silappatikaram, kani is used specifically used for time reckoning i.e, astronomical observations. “Kala kanithar” expression is used to denote astronomers, and astrologers (Silambu.5:44).

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If the black planet Saturn after arriving its place changes (in Zodiac), dhumaketu (தூமகேது, comet) appears in four directions; planet Velli (Venus) appears in the south.....all are bad omen (Puram. 38:1, 117: 1-2; 395: 33-35). Thus, they have bearing on the activities of men and society.

Tolkappiyam mentions that two methods are adopted to solve a problem with very (வெறி) i.e, veriyadal (Porul) – 1. Kattu and 2. Kazhangu. Kattu is the spreading of handful of paddy grains and counting. Depending upon the odd or even counting, the predictions are made. The details of Kazhangu, Molucca beads and prediction, thereof, are explained below. Velan, the priest uses two methods for prediction – 1. Veriyadal and 2. Choice of a root.

“Kuramagal kuri eyini” (குறமகள் குறி எயினி) is mentioned in the literature denoting that such tribal people are engaged in the fortune-telling (Nat.357; Puram.157). Ingurunuru shows that men also engaged in such profession (394).

Totally three types of dances are performed to please god / goddess – veriyadal (வெறியாடல்), kuravai kuttu (குறவை கூத்து) and tunangai (துணங்கை). These are performed at specific times.

The myth of Lizard and Astrology: The myth of astrology has been directly related to lizard in Tamil literature. Lizard is considered as one of the oldest species and hence, they know everything. Whenever lizard hoots, God is worshipped (Agam: 9-19). It has astrological mouth (kani vai) i.e, capable of predicting future (Agam. 151: 15). With melodious voice, the lizard announces only good news (Nat. 333: 10-13). It approves the good words told by a friend to lady-love (Kali. 11: 21). Lizard astrology [பல்லி ஜோதிடம்] has been popular in Tamilnadu, even today. Even the rational and atheist people are not comfortable, when lizard falls on them.

The myth of the Kazhangu - Guilandina Bondue: It is known as “Kazhangu” in the literature, used by the Velan for the purpose. The practice of soothsaying with the help of Molucca beans is found and described vividly. The word “kazhangu” significantly has the following meanings:

1. the Guilandina Bondue – kazharchi keeper.
2. A play among the females with nuts, Molucca beans.
3. possession by a spirit for uttering oracles.
4. Kazhangupata = to practice soothsaying with the help of Molucca-beans.
5. Gambling.

They are used for counting and playing. By observing the change of colour of kazhangu, the Velan diagnoses the disease of unmarried women, who reportedly suffering from some disease or so! Their mothers are so anxious and call Velan to probe into it.

The front of the house is cleaned thoroughly and decorated. Velan, the priest fixed the truth telling Kazhangu on the field. He started grazing it (Nat.268: 7-9).

Soothsaying Velan, predicted that the disease of the lady-love would be cured, if sacrifice was offered (to Murugu), after examining the Kazhangu placed on the ground, where the Bacchanalian dance was performed (Verikalam) (Nat.202: 5-6) in the midnight.

It is evident that kazhangu was used for prediction connecting with mathematics and predictive astrology. Thus, sometimes, the kazhangu-seeds are compared with cowries, chozhi, wampum shells, which are used for oracle, soothsaying or prediction.

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Mustard paste and smoke: The mustard smoke is used to drive away the evil forces (Puram. 98: 15), particularly, by the women with newborn babies. They also take bath with mustard paste and apply it on the floor and walls of the houses.

“Iyyavai anithal” [ஐயவை அணிதல்] is the application of the paste of white mustard and it is done along with “nayyani mayyakkam,” [நெய்யணி மயக்கம்], a purificatory ceremony performed after the delivery of a baby.

The mother, who has just delivered a baby, is considered impure. After some specified time, she is considered impure. After some specified time, she is given a bath to purify her body and the polluted state (pulavu puniru (புலவு புனிற்று) = the state of impurity – Madu. 602; Nat. 380: 1-6).

The bath also helps her to secrete milk (Nat. 40: 6-8; 370: 1-5; 380: 1-5), thus, attaining lactating stage. The bath is given with the application of ghee on her body.

The interior of the house, where, she has delivered the child is applied with the paste of ghee and white mustard seeds for the benefit of the mother and child (Madu. 615).

Puniru naru = the smell of child birth (Nat. 40: 6). A smelling smoke is applied to dispel it (Nat. 380: 1).

Thus, it was also used for exorcism⁵ to expel a supposed evil spirit from a person or place. That the mustard seeds, smoke etc. ward off evil forces, ghosts etc., is well-known even today, and practiced in the north Indian states. Therefore, it is interesting to note as to how the Tamils were following such practice 2500 YBP.

Use of Leaves, Leaf dresses etc: There are hundreds of references about women wearing dress made of leaves and coming or appearing before men. Most of the scholars on the subject have interpreted that the Tamils were leading tribal nature of life. But, here, it is evident that wearing of such dress indicates certain fertility rite or rite conducted by women who want to have a husband of her choice and symbolic. They also used cotton and silk dress made of various qualities with different colours (Perumpanatruppdai - 469).

It is not that they wear only dress made of leaves, as there are also references to show as to how such dress is decorated with flowers etc (Puram 341: 2-3; Agam. 156: 9-11; Nat. 390⁴).

In fact, a hero himself offers dress made of leaves and barks (Nat. 80: 5) to her lady-love. In another place, sling (tazhal), drum (tattai) and bark (muri) are offered (Kurun. 223:4).

Here, it is implied that they are offered with a proposal of marrying her. Most of the references are associated with “algu” [அல்குலை] i.e, mons veneris, and therefore, it must have been part of a fertility rite in those days and the dress made of leaves or barks are worn symbolically on such occasions.

Ornaments used to ward off evil spirits etc: In other places, “Izhai ani,” an ornament made in the form of a leaf is mentioned (Agam. 70 : 11-12; 201: 6-7; 275: 16-

⁵ Exorcism (from Greek εξορκισμός, exorkismós "binding by oath") is the religious or spiritual practice of evicting demons or other spiritual entities from a person, or an area, that are believed to be possessed.[1] Depending on the spiritual beliefs of the exorcist, this may be done by causing the entity to swear an oath, performing an elaborate ritual, or simply by commanding it to depart in the name of a higher power. The practice is ancient and part of the belief system of many cultures and religions – Wikipedia.

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19; 320: 3; Kurun. 125: 3; 159: 1). Even today, girls are worn this type of ornament upto five years, perhaps, as a remnant to indicate such age-old ritual.

Purananuru (77) enumerates the rituals conducted for a child in order:

1. Removal of silver anklet and tying of virakkazhal (ornament of valour). It reminds the Silambu kazhi nonbu (the ceremony of removal of anklet) performed in the case of women just before marriage.
2. Removal of hair (tonsure) and tying tender neem leave with Uzhinjai (cerua – a kind of cotton shrub) creeper.
3. Removal of small bangles and giving bow in hands.
4. Removal of Imbadaitali (on the fifth day of completion of childhood)
5. Dispensing with milk and started giving rice / cereal food.

The usage of neem and uzhinjai leaves imply protection from evil spirits and such ceremonies later converted into karanams i.e, established samskaras⁶.

Imbadaitali (ஐம்படைத்தாலி, Puram. 77: 6-7; Agam.54: 18) = an ornament worn by the children. Though, the five elements are not specifically described in the literature, the commentators imply that it contains five miniature symbols of Vishnu viz., conch, wheel, bow, sword and mace.

Pulippattali (புலிப்பதாலி, Puram.374: 9; Kurun.161:3; Agam 7: 17, 18, 22) = an ornament made of tiger's teeth worn by boys or married men (Kurun.161: 3; Puram. 374: 9). Agananuru describes that the teeth are embedded with the gold (Agam7:18' 54:18). It is also worn by girls (Agam. 7: 17).

The removal of Imbadaitali and wearing Pulippattali, may signify the matured age attained by the boy indicating the married status of the males. It may be noted they later, tying of tali is related to marriage, where male ties tali around the neck of female. Before marriage, Silambukazhi nonbu i.e, anklet removal ceremony is performed in the case of girls / women. Incidentally, these were used to ward off evil spirits to affect the children and grown up boys and girls and are ready for marriage.

Hair of women, tabooed: The hair is nurtured and decorated very carefully with oil and perfume by the Tamil ladies. A characteristic way of plaiting is in five parts. However, there is much taboo associated with hair. The interesting practice is that the hair of woman should not be touched by anybody other than mother. After marriage, it should not be touched by anybody other than her husband (Puram.113, 280; Kurun.225; Padit.44). After the death of her husband, she has to shave off of her hair (Puram. 25: 12-14; 250: 4-5), so that none could touch her hair⁷. Unplaited hair is considered inauspicious or a bad omen, because, it is well known only widows or demon like women are characterized so. A Panan worships a goddess under a kalli tree (euphorbia = milk hedge) as he has seen a woman with unplaited hair waving in air (Puram. 260: 3-5).

Widowhood tabooed: After the death of husband, a woman has to follow him through the practice of udankattaiyerudal [உடன்கட்டையேறுதல்] or tippaydal [திப்பாய்தல்] or sati. However, if she does not want to do so, she can lead life following kaimmai

⁶ K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, *Karanams of the Ancient Tamils*, This paper was presented at the first session of Tamilnadu History Congress, held at Madras from September 10 and 11, 1994.

⁷ It is interesting to note that Draupati took a vow that she would not plait her hair till the persons who touched her hair were killed.

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nonbu (Puram. 25, 62, 230, 234, 246, 250, 280). It includes shaving off of hair, removal of bangles and other ornaments, eating tasteless food prepared with a kind of low quality rice mixed with tamarind, bathing in cold water and sleeping on grass spread on the ground. They have to spend time by spinning cotton making threads (Puram. 326:5). As the life of a woman is so intimately connected with her husband, if he dies, that the practice of the ancient Tamils appear to be ending life by his wife along with him. The practice of kaimmai nonbu clearly proves that they consider widowhood as a taboo. Even today, Tamil women are proud of saying that they should die “auspiciously” (mangalagaramaga, மங்கலகரமாக). However, the kaimmai type nonbu is followed by few Brahmi women and not by other Tamil women.

Vadakkiruttal [வடக்கிருத்தல்]: Certain people evidently followed this practice of leaving mortal coil by doing penance of facing the direction of north⁸. Actually, it was the practice of the Jains who practiced such penance, known as “Sallekhana”. It is nothing but fast unto death practice. The ancient Tamils, obviously considered south as the important and auspicious direction (Puram. 11: 2-3; Pari. 10: 121). They also considered it as the aboard of their forefathers (9: 25). The adjective “ten” has been intimately connected with Pandians, Kumari, Ocean, pearl, breeze etc. therefore, this might be an intrusion of new or anti-belief (not combatable to Sangam society) slowly introduced, because of Jain influence⁹. Kopperunchozhan followed this penance (Puram. 219:4; 223: 1-3), however, he was not a Jain.

Varaipaydal / Udankattaiyerudal: Though, the word “sati” is not used, the expressions Tippiyadal (jumping into fire), Tikkulittal (taking bath in flames) and /udankattaiyerudal (entering into pyre along with the dead husband) are found. Tolkappiyam (Porul. Purattinaiyial.79) describes “tabudara nilai” [தபுதார நிலை] as the condition of a man who has lost his wife and “tabada nilai” [தாபத நிலை a] that of a woman who has lost her husband. Thus, it is a unique feature distinguishable from other societies. The literature is abundant with reference about women committing sati. The best famous example is Perungoppendu, who commits sati, when her husband Pudappandiyan is dead. She glorifies the act of sati (Puram. 246 and 247). The other examples are sati committed by the wives of Seraman kudakko Nedunjeraladan and Chozhan verpakakradakkaip peruvirakilli (62), Ay Andiran (240), an anonymous poet (256), the seven kings who opposed Talaiyalanganattu seru venra Pandiyan Nedunchezhiyan (78) etc.

Madalerudal: The practice followed by the men who have failure in their love affairs is Madalerudal. It is nothing but riding a Palmyra horse on the streets, so that the parents

⁸ M. S . Venkataswamy, *Samanamum, Tamizhaum*, Madras, 1959, p.182. He opined that vadakkiruttal is merely the Tamil equivalent of sallekhana. According to him the term originated from the fact that, since all the Urthankaras ended their worldly existence in the north, the Jainas, at the time of observing sallekhana, faced the holy north and hence the term vadakkiruttal (vadakku- north, iruttal ~seated or lying).

Also see N Subramanian, *Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index (1969)*, p 729 “Vadakkiruttal The penance of starving facing the north and self-immolation by slow starvation”.

⁹ During 3rd cent BCE, Chandragupta Maurya came to Sravana Beagola along with Bhadrabahu and died following the penance of “Sallekhana.”

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of the girl, whom he loved might consider his wish and marry their girl to him. Otherwise, he has to die in his attempt profusely bleeding. This might indirectly imply offering of blood to the denying girl to please her. This might be a modification of husband dying after the death of his wife “due to the grief” as in “tabudara nilai”. This practice also unique to Sangam society. The mental state of a male widow is also explained succinctly in Purananuru. Cheraman Kottambalattu tunjiya Makkodhai laments that he is still alive, when his wife has died (Puram. 245: 6-7). Surprisingly, the next two poems depict the sati committed by Perungoppendu! Definitely, the compiler must have done it purposely in grouping the poems.

Valour death: The death on the battle field or attained by any valour action like saving cattle, his nation etc., is glorified by the ancient poets. One poem (Puram. 278) describes as to how an old woman gets angry and vows to cut off of her breasts, when she hears that her son has been killed, while running away from the battle field. She goes to the battle field and searches for his body. When she finds wounds on the chest of his body and not on the back, she proudly declares that she is happier than when she begot him! Another poem describes as to how even the dead bodies of babies are cut into two with sword and buried! As the pledge or oath made is remarkable and there is a reason to believe that such type of oath or even actual act would have developed in the myth of “Oru mulai arutta tiruma unni,” [ஒரு முலையறுத்த திருமா உண்ணி] i.e., the woman named Tiruma unni, who has cut off her one breast! Actually, it was Kannagi (widow), who burned the city Madurai by self-amputated breast. Later she dies with one breast with bleeding. Incidentally, the legend of Meenakshi gives the detail of her birth with three breasts and disappearing one, after meeting her would-be husband, Sundareswarar. Incidentally, breast, vow, fire, death and other factors are linked in the myth. These are examples prove the belief that the valor death would take them to heaven.

Omen, sign, warning etc: There have been many Omen, sign, warning etc have been mentioned in the ancient Tamil literature and they are listed as follows for illustrative purposes:

1. Offering of rice to crow for the indicated arrival of lover (Kurun.210.7).
2. Even poets blame birds, cries of birds, directions, if they do not get rewards (Puram. 204: 1.10).
3. They believe that demons reside in the trees and graveyards (Puram. 230:10).
4. The belief of God / goddess / demon residing in trees is found in many places (Agam. 270: 12-14; Nat. 270: 12-14; Puram.199:1). Vengai tree is considered divine. Boys avoid climbing up vengai tree for plucking its flowers, instead, they are happy with fallen flowers (Kurun.241: 4-5).
5. Demonesses swarm crematory grounds attack the dead bodies and eat the white flesh embracing them. Then, they dance in the fire light of burning dead bodies (Puram. 359” 4-7).
6. The demon and her women friends swarm the battle field and take out flesh out of the dead bodies (to eat) so that their hair and fingers would be in red due to soaking with blood (Puram. 62: 2-4).
7. The Pulaya woman is considered to have been possessed with murugu (devil and she shakes and jumps her body like cattle in herds (Puram. 259: 5-6).

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8. The possessed girl is subjected to following ritual to drive the devil away. The throat of a goat is slit and placed before her with millets. Then, instruments are sounded in high din to please the devil, so that it may leave the girl (Kurun. 263: 1-5).
9. Even the wounded ones are protected from the demonesses or devils, as they attack them for blood and flesh. The wife of a wounded soldier ties the leaves of iravam and vembu (neem) prominently on the roof of the house to drive away devils. Many instruments are sounded. Mustard paste is applied inside the house. Small white mustard is also sprayed. Ambal flute is played. Bells are rung. Songs are sung in /kanchi tune. Sweet smelling incense of agil (Aquila) is used to smoke the house. These are the acts carried on to drive away evil forces (Puram. 28: 1-6). This incorporates the belief that even dead bodies should not be mutilated, thereby, they will not have any defects in next birth.
10. Puram.41 lists the bad omens that ought to be avoided in the dreams:
 - Falling of meteorites from the skies in all eight directions;
 - Burning of leafless trees;
 - Appearance of scorching sun in all directions;
 - Hooting of birds like owls and others;
 - Fall of teeth on the ground;
 - Pouring of oil on the head
 - Riding on a pig
 - Removal of dress
 - Overturning of the bed decorated with soft white cloth on which weapon is placed (4-11).
11. Auspicious day is chosen for journey (Puram. 124:1; Kali.5).
12. Crow's cry indicates arrival of guests (Kurun. 210; Ingu.391).
13. The influence of thought over birth and rebirth is so evident that a lady-love prays that they should die together (Kurun. 57: 3-4).
14. The crematory grounds are avoided (Kurun. 231: 3).
15. "Vrichi" is the good words told by strangers or others accidentally but having relation with the context. The Tamils believe in Virichu also (Kurun. 218:3) and it is taken as good omen / prophecy / divine word revealed.

The myth of Five elements (Panchabhuta tatva): The five elements earth, water, air, ether and fire have been mentioned at different places (Padit. 14: 1-4; 24: 15; Puram. 2: 1-6; madu.453-454). The relation between them is also explained:

- ⇒ Earth is conglomeration of soil;
- ⇒ Sky is connected with earth;
- ⇒ Wind is produced in the sky
- ⇒ Fire is from wind and
- ⇒ Water is from fire (Puram. 2: 1-6).

The relation between body, life and growth with earth, water and food is also explained: As the human body depends on water, giving food amounts to giving life, because body is primarily based on food. Food is nothing but water in association with land (earth). One who combines water and land into one is God and the combination is "Unavin pindam" i.e, the body is considered as food, as it grows with the intake of food (Puram.18:19-23, 186:1-4). Of course, without fire, the food cannot be digested, hence it is mentioned as "Vayitrutti" (stomach fire) [Agam.74:5; Padit.20:26]. Without air, life

cannot last. This is the “Panchabhuta tatva” connecting five natural elements with the creation of five senses of human body and hence the man himself. Therefore, when a man dies, it is quite natural to think that his body should go back to the five natural elements quickly, so that he may have the next life immediately. For man, while living also all his acts are related to these elements and hence all rituals, rites and ceremonies incorporates them. For illustration, some practices are discussed:

Water: Water is prominently figuring in all rites. Alms are given by pouring water (Kurun. 233: 4-5). Perungoppendu compares the pond full of water with blossomed lotus flowers and cool water and pyre with flames are one and the same for her (Puram. 246” 11-15).

Earth: Earth or clay is used for bathing, particularly, for cleaning hair by ladies (Kurun.113:5). Dead bodies are buried (Puram.238” 1-5; 228:12; 364:13; Nat. 27: 11-12; Padit.44:22-23).

Ether: it is origin to air (Puram.2:3) and also considered as abode of God.

Air: it is originated from ether and closely associated with fire (Puram. 41: 16-18; Pari. 13: 23-25).

Fire: Fire is figuring in all rituals. Veriyadal, velvi, marriage, iyavi pugai etc., are conducted only with fire. Lady-love is eager to marry her lover,, just like ghee mixing with fire implying that she is ready to marry with sacraments of kindled fire etc (Kurun. 106: 5-6).

The myth of blood, purity and impurity: the association of myth with blood is indirectly revealed, as the glorification of blood has been more. Purananuru glorifies the “Kala velvi” = yagnas conducted on the battle field, i.e, the exploits of kings and warriors on the battle field, where, the more the flow of blood, the more is the glory and adoration by the poets. However, the taboo and myth of blood is revealed in other verses.

Tolkappiyam specifically mentions that men should not touch women during their menstrual period of three days (Tol. Porul. 187).

In all propitiatory rites blood is offered by the sacrifice of some animal.

Even in the ceremony accorded in the Royal Tabour, blood is offered as a part of sacrifice (Padit. 19: 6; 103: 11-14’ Puram. 50: 4-6). Interestingly, uzhinjai is also used (Puram. 50: 4).

Maravar sacrifices a cow, sprinkle its blood at the bottom of a big neem tree, where, the goddess resides and eats the flesh of it (Agam. 307: 2-6).

In veriyadal, a goat is always sacrificed and its blood is mixed with flour etc., and offered to murugu. As the lady-love is pregnant, it is evident that it is a kind of a fertility rite.

The myth of Murugu, pregnancy and women: The association of anangu, sur goddess or demonness with Murugan is brought out in many places (anangudai murugan – Puram. 299: 5). Then, “Varaiyara makalir” (வரையரை மகளிர்), “Vanara makalir” (வானர மகளிர்), “Nirara makalir” (நீரர மகளிர்), etc., the goddesses residing in sky, earth, water and so on. They are all considered as bad goddesses, as they inflict upon the human beings.

The position of women with Velan / Murugan has also been interesting as it changes. The women should not touch the vessels of the temple of Murugan with anangu (kalam thoda magalir –Puram.299: 6-7), as it would affect them, particularly, when they are pregnant or virgins. In Mahsarastra and West Bengal, there has been a belief that vigin

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girls visit the temples of Karttikeya, he may rape them! In fact, Velan, the priest declares that the lady-love has been affected by the murugu / murugan. This clearly proves that in the initial stages in the development of Murugan myth, he is considered as harmful to pregnant women and then, slowly, he is described as a friend of them¹⁰. It may be remembered that Guga / Guha¹¹ / Karttikeya (Skanda) affect pregnant ladies by destroying fetus from their embryo she goddesses like Jara, Jataharini, Hariti and Ayohi associated with Murugu, who steal fetus and kidnap babies and children¹². In the literature, the fiery goddess Anangu and Sur affect them.

In fact, it is evident that the ladies-love, who are referred to Velan for veriyadal have already been pregnant, as they have had union with their lovers with symptoms exhibited in change and color on their bodies etc., and Velan characteristically predicts that they have been affected with murugu and their disease would be cured, if sacrifice is offered to murugu!

Offering of food to the dead: A widow cleans a small place in a circular shape resembling the foot of an elephant with water, spreads grass and place a small rice ball on it, requesting her dead husband to eat it (Puram. 234: 2-4).

A widow cleans the place on the ground as small as winnowing pan with her tears and cow dung, then, places food for her husband, who has reached the other world (Puram.249: 12-14).

After the bier¹³ is placed on the crematory grounds, the dead body is offered with food to it served by a Pulayan along with liquor and entered into fire., after that, the left out is shared by others (Puram. 360: 17-20).

The boiled saltless food is received through a Pulayan and is placed on the earth without looking back (Puram. 363: 10-14).

These references show that the ancient Tamils have belief in the eating food by the dead. The food is offered by a Pulayan with dead rites. As they believe in rebirth, the offering of food implies in hastening the process of preta / dead body life to be completed quickly to have next birth.

The food offered to deity should not be eaten by others (Kuru. 105: 2-3) with the belief that it might actually eat.

The belief in rebirth: there are many references abundantly found in the literature to prove that they have belief in rebirth, cyclic nature of birth and death, next world, transmigration of soul and mortality. These ideas have been closely connected with their thinking and actions and thus, even in such factors, purity is stressed, expected and maintained (Puram.134:1-4, 214:6-13, 236:10-12, 245:4-7, 256, 356 to 363, 27:11-14, 31:2, 188; Nat.397:7-9). This, a lover prays tht she should have the same husband in the next birth also. Even hero believes that love continues in the ext birth (Kurun.199:8).

¹⁰ K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, **The Development of Karrtikeya / Muruga myth in the Sangam Literature**, a paper presented at the National seminar conducted on March 13, 1996 at CPR Indological Research Foundation, Madras.

¹¹ Just like goddesses stole the babies / children, Murgan had kept the Devas in a cave and thus, he is known as Guga / Guha.

¹² They have been vividly exhibited in the sculptures accordingly, as pointed out V. S. Agrawala etc.

¹³ a movable frame on which a coffin or a corpse is placed before burial or cremation or on which they are carried to the grave.

External symbolism: A thread is tied around wrist after fasting before the Suli (Kurun. 218: 2). Queen ties kadikainul – a protection thread around her wrist and appears without decoration as her husband has gone to a battle field (Nedu.144-142). Mention about Imbadaittali and Pulippaltali has already been made. During marriage tying of tali around the neck of the bride is practiced. It is also implied by the act of removal of it, when husband dies (Padit. 5:15; Puram. 127:5; 261: 18; 78: 8-12). About “tazhaiyani” also mention as been made¹⁴. Originally, all these must have been used as talisman / amulet / charm / fetish. With ritualization and codification of sacraments, there are used to satisfy the psychosomatic conditions of human beings.

Deified nature and persons: There have been many names of Gods and Goddesses which clearly prove that natural elements and prominent persons or personalities have been deified. Some of them are mentioned and discussed.

- Salini =devaratti, the female priest or counterpart of Velan (Madu.603-610),
- Sur = terrific or beautiful goddess (Padit. 31: 34-35)
- Suli = goddess with “Sulam” – trident (Kurun. 218)
- Takkanangu = attacking goddess (Agam.7:3-5)
- Tiruma unni, Oru mulai arutta tiruma unni,” i.e, the woman named who has cut off her one breast (Nat.216).
- Kadalkezh selvi = the goddess of sea or ocean (Agam.370:3)
- Kadal theivam = the goddess of sea or ocean (Kali. 131: 1-2)
- Kadavut peyariya kanam = a forest with the nae of a Goddess, Kotravi is implied (Padit. 88: 2-6, 14’ 66: 14-15)
- Kadavut pattini = God like caste and pure woman (Padit.Padigam. 5: 3-7)
- Kadurai katavul = God living in the forest (Porun. 52, 56)
- Kariyundi kadavul = the God that drank poison implying Shiva (Malai. 81-83)

The development of murugu / sur / anangu and superimposition on Velan, the priest, possessed etc., can be noted in the context.

Development of Sacraments: Definitely, these myths, connected with magic or superstition, have led to the development of sacraments indicating an organized and civilized society. They are known as “karanam” (Tol. Porul. Karpiyal. 143). The above rites, rituals and ceremonies are codified to karanams to be performed in a sequential manner covering from birth to death of human beings. Thus, the magic aspect is slowly demythologized and psycho-somatic understanding and requirement lead to scientific interpretation. Thus, when the ancients were very much worried about pollution, dirt, contamination etc., now, hygiene, sterility, sanitation etc., are talked about with change of time and places.

Sangam – language, literature and poets: Though, Sangam period has been accepted as the period between c.500 / 300 BCE to 100 CE, all the poems found in the Ettuttogai and Pattuppattu were not composed at a particular date or period. By reading the poems, their nature, quality and other poetic features could be noted, as definitely,

¹⁴ K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, *Tali System in the Sangam Age*, Proceedings of Indian History Congress, Vol.52, 1991, p.192.

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about 150-200 poems cannot be read, understood and explained by any Tamil expert of the day. Therefore, their authours could not have been belonging to “tribal” society, as some scholars imagine. Definitely, their acumen, wisdom and brain standards had been far better than any highly civilized men of the period or even today. Therefore, their material culture could not be belittled for non-availability of archaeological evidences. Language without historical evidences and evidences without literature has been common in history. It is not fault of refined literature available or the poets who produced but, that of historians and researchers. Therefore, they should keep the racial bias, linguistic chauvinism, and racist ideology aside and conduct research. Then only, the facts beside could be understood for interpretation. As for as Tamil studies are concerned, Tamil chauvinism worked differently till the Indus Valley civilization was discovered. Then, the “Aryan-Dravidian” race hypotheses and theories affected them heavily in producing books. After the demise of race hypotheses and theories, the linguistic chauvinism continued marring the research. Therefore, here, such hypotheses and theories are kept aside and interpretations made to reach conclusion.

Conclusion: The present-day historians argue that Sangam people were in tribal nature of state slowly developing. As were no archaeological evidences dating back to 3rd century BCE proving the existence of cities, towns and established settlements, they argue that there was no “State formation”. The “state formation in South India,” has been questioned, interpreted and decided by historians like Burton Stein ¹⁵, characteristically and followed by Indian counterparts like Chempaka Lakshmi¹⁶ and others. However, the existence of tribal like magical rites and established karanams together among the ancient Tamils show that they were leading a civilized state of society only, as cities and ports were mentioned. The karanams have always incorporated age-old beliefs and practices symbolically in rites and rituals. Personified or deified nature is proved in the development of Gods and Goddesses. The fire cult has also been influential in the evolution of elaborate ritualization of karanams with the application or presence of fire, e.g, marriage. The demythologization proves the real status of the Tamils during the Sangam period.

¹⁵ Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi, OUP, 1980.

¹⁶ Champakalakshmi, R., ‘Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India’, A Review Article, The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. XVIII, Nos. 3 and 4, 1981: 411 – 426.

....., *‘Ideology and the State in South India’*, Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Memorial Lecture – 1, A. P. History Congress, XIII Session, Srisailam, 1989.